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ABSTRACT

Based on surveys of 375 elementary, middle, and high schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), this report identifies differences and similarities in the development and quality of these schools' programs of school, family, and community partnership, examining how NNPS members at various school levels implemented partnership programs and used NNPS tools and services; support for and obstacles to partnerships; and how factors like school context, program support, and NNPS connections influenced program quality. Results indicated that schools made progress in improving the quality of their partnerships. They reported implementing meaningful partnership activities linked to school goals such as improving student achievement, behavior, and attendance; school climate; and parental and community involvement. Some partnership activities were common across grade levels. School newsletters, parent information folders, and volunteer directories were implemented at all school levels. However, the content and frequency of newsletters, information in parent folders, and type of volunteer opportunities differed by grade level. High schools were least likely to report implementing activities for each of six types of involvement. Four factors were important to overall partnership programs quality: widespread support for partnership; supportive, engaged partnership teams; adequate funding; and active use of research-based tools. (Contains 37 references.) (SM)

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A Comparison of Elementary, Middle, and High Schools

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THE CENTER

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children fail to meet their potential. Many students, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that sort some students into high-quality programs and other students into low-quality education. CRESPAR believes that schools must replace the "sorting paradigm" with a "talent development" model that sets high expectations for all students, and ensures that all students receive a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes—ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs—and conducted through research and development programs in the areas of early and elementary studies; middle and high school studies; school, family, and community partnerships; and systemic supports for school reform, as well as a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, and supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

ABSTRACT

Based on survey data collected from 375 elementary, middle, and high schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), this report identifies differences and similarities in the development and quality of schools' programs of school, family, and community partnership. Middle schools in the sample were similar to elementary schools in their implementation of practices to involve families and communities. Differences related to school level were primarily found between high schools and other school levels. These differences primarily centered on reported obstacles to partnerships, and key aspects of program implementation. The significance and implications of the study's findings are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Extensive research indicates that when schools, families, and communities work together as partners, students benefit (see summaries of studies in Epstein, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Rutherford, Anderson, Billig, & RMC Research Corporation, 1997). The inclusion of family involvement in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act is evidence of a growing national recognition of the importance of families and communities to students' school success at all ages and grade levels. Yet, despite the importance of families' active influence and engagement in their children's education, many families decrease their involvement as their children progress from elementary school to middle and high school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Lee, 1994). Research suggests that this decline is due, in part, to weaker partnership practices in secondary schools (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). To explore similarities and differences between elementary and secondary schools' programs of school, family, and community partnership, this report uses survey data collected from 375 elementary, middle, and high schools that joined the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) before December 1997. The report further explores how the NNPS, an organization designed to build schools' capacity to develop excellent partnership programs, can address school-level differences to foster greater parent and community involvement across grade levels.

School, Family and Community Partnerships in Secondary Schools: Importance and Obstacles

Some educators and parents believe that the importance of family involvement in students' education declines as students mature (see Sanders & Epstein, 2000a). However, research documenting the importance of parental involvement for adolescents' school success spans more than three decades. Family involvement practices at home and at school have been found to influence middle and high school students' academic achievement and success in school (Catsambis, 1998; Clark, 1983; Ginsburg & Hanson, 1986; Lee, 1994; Simon, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2001); school attendance (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1995); homework effort (Keith, Reimers, Fehrman, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986; Keith, Keith, Troutman, Bickley, Trivette, & Singh, 1993); and graduation and college matriculation rates (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Delgado-Gaitan, 1988). Duncan (1969), for example, compared the attendance, achievement, and dropout rates of two junior high classes. In one class, parents had individual meetings with counselors before their children entered junior high school. In the other class, counselors did not meet with parents. After three years, the students whose parents met individually with school counselors had significantly higher attendance and grade point averages, and lower dropout rates than students whose parents did not meet with the counselors.

Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) studied the effects of parental involvement in high school activities on student outcomes. The study was based on questionnaire data from students.

parents, and teachers at six San Francisco Bay Area high schools. The authors found that adolescents whose parents attended school functions received higher grades than adolescents whose parents did not. The authors also found the lowest levels of family involvement in school programs and processes among minority parents and low-income families. The authors concluded that, without interventions designed to encourage greater parental involvement, educational and economic inequalities will persist for many poor and minority students.

Using nationally representative student, parent, and school administrator data from follow-up surveys of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS), Plank and Jordan (1997; also see Jordan & Plank, 2000) found that communication among high school students, parents, and school personnel about academic matters and post-secondary preparation increased students' chances of enrolling in four-year colleges or other post-secondary institutions. The authors noted that parent-student discussions with teachers, counselors, and other personnel should begin before the sophomore year to have the greatest impact on students' plans after high school. They also emphasized the importance of family-school connections for low-income students. They found that fewer qualified students in this population advanced to four-year colleges or other post-secondary institutions.

Also using NELS survey data, Simon (2001) found that family involvement positively affected various academic and behavioral outcomes. For example, when parents attended college-planning workshops or talked with their adolescents about college planning, adolescents earned better report card grades in English and math and completed more course credits in English and math. The more often parents accompanied teens to school activities (e.g., plays, sports), the more regularly students attended school. Also, the more often adolescents and parents talked about school or spent free time together, the better the students' behavior and the more likely they were to come to class prepared to learn. The study found that even through the last year of high school, and regardless of students' socioeconomic background or prior achievement, families positively influenced adolescents' school success.

Despite these and similar findings, many families are not involved in their adolescents' learning at school or at home (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Lee, 1994). A study by Search Institute found that four practices of family involvement—discussions about homework; discussions about school and school work; helping with homework; and attending school meetings and events—decline significantly between grades 6 and 12. The study revealed that by the junior or senior year in high school, relatively few adolescents have parents who maintain an active interest in school and education (George, 1995).

There are several reasons why school, family, and community partnerships are more prevalent at elementary schools than at middle and high schools. These include teacher and parental attitudes that adolescents are older and, therefore, no longer require parent involvement in their education (Epstein & Connors, 1994), and the lack of district and state leadership and assistance to middle and high school educators to encourage the development of partnership programs (Chavkin, 1995).

Research also suggests that the decline in parental involvement in the education of adolescents reflects weaker secondary school practices to involve families. Purnell and Gott (1985) found that while secondary teachers noted the importance of school, family, and community partnership practices, they felt that they did not have sufficient time to implement such activities. Similarly, Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) found that the majority of high school teachers (60%) reported contacting few or almost no parents. Dornbusch and Glasgow (1996) argued that because middle and high school students are assigned to multiple teachers, who are responsible for teaching large numbers of students, the nature of teacher-student relationships and teacher-family relationships changes. Due to constraints on time and resources, secondary school teachers are less likely to regularly communicate with or encourage the active involvement of all students' families. The authors found that most teacher-initiated contacts were either with parents of students who were academically successful, or with parents of students who were at risk of failure or described as discipline problems.

Yet, survey and case study data (Sanders & Epstein, 2000a; Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999) suggest that with the right support, a framework of involvement, and an action team approach, teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members at all grade levels can work together to build effective partnership programs. The present study compares the accessibility, use, and quality of these three components among elementary, middle, and high schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools. In so doing, it identifies ways that the NNPS can positively influence the development, improvement, and maintenance of comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs at all school levels and for all students.

METHODS

Sample

The study's sample consists of schools that joined the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University before December 1997. The NNPS provides theory-driven and research-based assistance, support, and training to schools, districts, and states that are committed to building permanent school, family, and community partnership programs. To join the NNPS, schools agree to make some on-site investments to develop their programs. Each school agrees to use an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) composed of the principal, teachers, and family and community representatives, and Epstein's framework of six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995) to develop a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships. The six types of involvement are (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with the community.

In addition to implementing practices for the six types of involvement, schools are encouraged to meet challenges for each type of involvement (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). These challenges encourage schools to go beyond traditional practices and understandings of school, family, and community partnerships to be more responsive to *all* families, including those under social and economic stresses, those with physical handicaps, and those from minority linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Schools in the NNPS are in about 30 states across the country, and are demographically diverse. About one third of the schools are in large cities (34%), more than one quarter (27%) are in suburban areas; 20% are in small cities, and about 19% are in rural areas. The majority (70%) are elementary schools serving students from prekindergarten to grade 6; 14% are middle schools, serving students from grades 4 to 9; 7% are high schools, serving students between grades 9 and 12; and 9% are schools that serve students from a range of grade levels. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the schools receive Title I funds, and 43% receive school-wide Title I funds. The schools also differ in the size and ethnic diversity of their student populations. For example, one third of the schools reported that their students' families speak between two and five languages other than English.

This report presents analyses of data from 375 NNPS schools (83% of the total number of schools returning surveys) that returned an annual survey on their work and progress at the end of the 1997-98 school year, and could be categorized as either an elementary, middle, or high school using the above definitions. The schools were at different starting points in conducting involvement activities, and they differed in how well they progressed from one year to the next in implementing and improving their programs of partnership. The schools were similar, however, in that they shared an expressed desire and readiness to engage in comprehensive partnership program development. As such, they provide a wealth of information that may help other elementary, middle, and high schools to better understand partnerships as a strategy for improvement.

Instrument

During the spring of 1998, each school that joined the NNPS by December 1997 was asked to complete *UPDATE*, an annual end-of-year survey. The survey is designed to help the NNPS (a) update the names and addresses of school key contacts; (b) learn about schools' progress and challenges in their work on partnerships; and (c) understand how to better support schools' work with useful services. Four hundred fifty-two (452) NNPS school members returned completed surveys (74% of total NNPS population) for the 1997-98 school year. Surveys were completed by school key contacts to the NNPS. Respondents included school principals (44%), family/community involvement coordinators (15%), teachers (14%), Title I personnel (8%), school counselors, social workers, and nurses (6%), and other school personnel and parents (13%). More than half of the respondents who completed surveys (51%) were assisted by additional members of their schools' ATPs.

Research Questions

This study addressed two main research questions: 1) What do partnership programs look like at the elementary, middle, and high school levels? and 2) What predicts the overall quality of school, family, and community partnership programs? To address these questions, *UPDATE* data were analyzed first to evaluate how NNPS members at various school levels implemented their partnership programs; used NNPS tools and services; and reported support for, and obstacles to, partnerships. Next, this study investigated how selected factors, including school context, program support, and NNPS connections, influenced partnership program quality. Given that partnership programs tend to be weaker in high schools, it was expected that elementary and middle schools would report stronger partnership programs. Additionally, it was believed that the more general support, action team support, and satisfaction with funding, the higher the partnership program rating. Finally, given that partnership programs develop over time, it was believed that years in the NNPS and use of NNPS tools and services would be positively related to higher program quality.

To address the first question regarding school-level differences in partnership programs, this study compared rates of (a) schools' use of NNPS tools and services; (b) partnership program implementation; and (c) support for and obstacles to partnerships by school level. A range of measures within each of the three categories were evaluated. Descriptive statistics for these measures will be discussed and are listed for reference in Table 1. Next, in multivariate analyses, this study investigated how school level predicted partnership program quality. Variables used in multivariate analyses are described below, with descriptive statistics for these variables listed in Table 2.

Variables

Dependent Variable. Overall Program Quality, a single-item indicator, measured schools' overall rating of partnership program quality (0=not yet started; 1=start-up program; 2=fair/average program; 3=good program; 4=very good program; 5=excellent program). Detailed descriptions for each response category were provided to respondents, and included descriptions of each rating from start-up programs (e.g., schools had no full Action Team for Partnerships [ATPs] and conducted few partnership activities) to excellent programs (e.g., schools had well-functioning ATPs that replaced members as needed; activities were conducted for the six types of involvement and were linked to school goals; partnership activities met key challenges and were evaluated; partnership plans were shared with school improvement councils; and the partnership program was a permanent part of the total school program.)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for School Characteristics, Use of NNPS Tools/Services, Program Implementation, and Support for and Obstacles to Partnerships

		Elementary (n=139-289)*		*Middle* (n=28-59)*		*High* (n=10-27)*	
VARIABLE	**METRIC**	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
Use of Network Tools/Services							
Use handbook	0=no, 1=yes	.77	.42	.79	.41	.73	.45
Access website	"	.18	.38	.23	.42	.30	.47
Read newsletter	"	.91	.28	.93	.26	.92	.27
Display certificate	"	.68	.47	.70	.46	.75	.44
E-mail NNPS	"	.00	.17	.00	.25	.00	.28
Program Implementation							
Wrote One-Year Action Plan, 1997-98	0=no, 1=yes	.88	.32	.88	.33	.89	.32
Activities for six types	"	.67	.47	.64	.48	.44	.51
Regular ATP meetings	"	.63	.48	.64	.48	.59	.50
End-of-year evaluation	"	.79	.41	.81	.39	.81	.40
Replace ATP members	"	.37	.48	.49	.50	.41	.50
Wrote One-Year Action Plan 1998-99		.59	.49	.56	.50	.67	.48
General Support							
How much support from…							
	1=none, 2=a little,						
…teachers	3=some, 4= a lot	3.33	.70	3.25	.69	3.00	.73
…PTA/PTO	"	3.33	.86	3.22	.94	2.78	1.00
…School Council/SIT	"	3.45	.74	3.45	.72	3.19	.90
…parents	"	3.28	.67	3.29	.65	2.96	.81
…other family members	"	2.79	.85	2.68	.91	2.33	.91
…community partners	"	3.10	.80	3.20	.84	3.19	.75
…other administrators	"	3.33	.89	3.50	.82	3.29	.95
…counselors	"	3.16	.99	3.34	.92	3.11	.99
…parent liaison	"	3.46	.85	3.36	1.05	2.86	.96
…school board	"	2.58	1.06	2.44	1.13	2.26	1.05
…District Title I office	"	2.79	1.12	2.71	1.30	2.30	1.34

* In most cases, sample sizes were at the higher end of ranges. For several variables—access NNPS website, e-mail NNPS, and selected general support measures—the sample sizes were reduced.

Table 1 continued

		Elementary (n=139-287)		*Middle* (n=28-59)		*High* (n=10-27)	
VARIABLE	**METRIC**	-	SD	-	SD	-	SD
Obstacles to Partnerships							
Lack of time	0=no, 1=yes	.45	.50	.43	.50	.56	.51
Lack of funds	"	.30	.46	.34	.48	.30	.47
Lack of support from parents/families	"	.18	.39	.21	.41	.37	.49
Funding							
Adequacy of funds	0=not enough funds 1=adequately funded 2=well funded	.63	.62	.55	.60	.60	.58
Budget for partnerships		median=$2000		median=$3000		median=$2000	
School used funds from:							
Goals 2000	0=no, 1=yes	.34	.48	.36	.48	.40	.50
Federal drug prevention	"	.17	.38	.25	.43	.16	.37
Principal discretion. fund	"	.40	.49	.38	.49	.24	.44
PTA/PTO contributions	"	.51	.50	.45	.50	.16	.37

Independent Variables. The independent variables fell under three broad categories: contextual; program support; and NNPS connection.

Measures of school context were School Location (urban or non-urban) and School Level (high school or not). As revealed in descriptive analyses, most school level differences were found between high schools and other schools. Because of this pattern, regression analyses relied on a two-category measure of school level instead of the three categories used in the descriptive analyses. Three variables measured program support: a) General Support, an 11-item scale (α=.88), measured how much support (1=none; 2=a little; 3=some; 4= a lot) the school's partnership program received from teachers and parents (other than those on the ATP), PTA/PTO members, school board members, district leaders and others; b) ATP Support, a single-item indicator, measured how much support (1=none; 2=a little; 3=some; 4= a lot) was provided by the school committee responsible for planning and implementing the partnership program; and c) Funding, also a single-item indicator, rated the adequacy of funding for partnership activities (from 0=not enough funds to 2=well funded). Two variables measured NNPS connections. These variables were Years in the NNPS and Use of NNPS Tools (composite of respondent's use of the NNPS newsletter and handbook).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Predictors of Overall Program Quality/Items in Regression Analyses

VARIABLE	METRIC	DISTRIBUTION
Dependent Variable		
Overall program quality	0=not yet started, 1=start-up, 2=fair/average, 3=good, 4=very good 5=excellent	N=373 Mean=3.79 SD=1.16
Independent Variables		
School Context		
School level	0=elementary/middle 1=high	elem./middle (93%) high (7%)
School location	0=non-urban 1=urban	191 non-urban (46%) 229 urban (55%)
Partnership Program		
General support 11-item scale (α=.88)	See variables listed under "General Support" in Table 1	N=367 Scale mean=3.16 SD=.58
ATP support	1=none, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a lot	N=331 Mean=3.66 SD=.59
Funding	0=not enough funds 1=adequately funded 2=well funded	N=356 Mean=.62 SD=.61
NNPS Connections		
Use of NNPS tools	Composite measure of use of handbook and newsletter. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics	N=348 Mean=.84 SD=.29
Years in NNPS	1= one year membership 2=two years membership	N=375 Mean=1.33 SD=.47

Analyses

Ordinary least squares regression analyses tested how school context, school program support, and NNPS connections influenced the overall quality of school, family, and community Partnership programs. Variables were entered in three blocks. The first block included two school contextual variables: School Level (non-high school excluded as reference); and School Location (non-urban excluded as reference). The second block added in three school program support measures: General Support, ATP Support, and Funding. The third block added in two NNPS connection variables: Years in the NNPS and Use of NNPS Tools.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Use of NNPS Tools and Services. When schools join the NNPS, they receive, or have access to, a variety of tools and services. NNPS tools and services were designed to provide schools with the information and guidance needed to develop comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnership that support student learning and development. One of these tools is the NNPS handbook, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Epstein et al., 1997). The handbook includes research summaries, examples of activities for the six types of involvement, planning forms, workshop agendas, and a variety of other materials that schools can use to plan, implement, evaluate, and improve their partnership programs. Each school also receives a membership certificate to display as a symbol of its commitment to partnerships. Schools receive *Type 2*, the NNPS semi-annual newsletter that contains information on research and practice in the field, and an annual collection of *Promising Partnership Practices* (Salinas, Clark, Simon, & Van Voorhis, 1998), which showcases effective partnership strategies that schools, districts, and states in the NNPS have implemented.

Schools also can access information about the NNPS through its website. The website includes all issues of *Type 2* and *Promising Partnership Practices*, frequently asked questions about school, family, and community partnerships, and a bulletin board where NNPS members can share ideas, questions, and information about program implementation and improvement (Simon, Salinas, & Epstein, 1997). Schools can contact NNPS staff with questions or concerns via e-mail or telephone. The NNPS also holds an annual training workshop at Johns Hopkins University to provide school, district, and state members with the skills and information needed to facilitate the development of partnership programs at their individual sites.

As reported in Table 1, survey data suggest that most elementary, middle, and high schools use NNPS tools and services. Some tools and services are used more than others. For example, most survey respondents from elementary (91%), middle (93%), and high (92%) schools reported reading *Type 2*. About three quarters of elementary (77%), middle (79%), and high schools (73%) reported using the NNPS handbook, or displaying their certificate of membership (elementary—68%; middle—70%; high schools—75%). Fewer respondents reported e-mailing the staff for assistance and accessing the NNPS website. As more educators have gained e-mail and Internet access, however, the use of these services has increased since the NNPS' first full year of operation in 1997 (see Sanders, 1999). High schools and middle schools were more likely than elementary schools to connect with the NNPS via e-mail and website. For example, 18% of elementary school respondents, 23% of middle school respondents, and 30% of high school respondents reported accessing the NNPS website. Fewer schools (elementary—3%; middle—6%; high—8%) reported e-mailing the NNPS staff. Although there were differences among elementary, middle, and high schools in the use of the

NNPS tools and services, bivariate analyses indicated that these differences were not statistically significant.

Program Implementation. The NNPS has identified four primary steps to a well-implemented program of school, family, and community partnerships (Sanders, 1999). Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) must (1) develop a One-Year Action Plan for School, Family, and Community Partnerships; (2) plan activities for the six types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community; (3) meet on a regular schedule to discuss partnership activities and plans; and (4) evaluate program effectiveness. To maintain their partnership programs from year to year so that they become fully integrated into school culture and practice, two additional steps are needed. ATPs must (1) replace members who leave the team, and (2) write new One-Year Action Plans for Partnership for the next academic year.

Analyses of survey data showed that most schools in the NNPS are making progress in developing their partnership programs. As shown in Table 1, for example, most elementary (88%), middle (88%), and high (89%) school respondents reported having written One-Year Action Plans for the 1997-98 school year. However, perhaps because of greater experience with family and community involvement, respondents at elementary and middle schools were more likely than high school respondents to report having planned and carried out activities for all six types of involvement. While 67% of elementary and 64% of middle schools reported having implemented activities for all six types of involvement, only 44% of high school respondents reported doing so. Zero order correlations indicated that there is a negative and statistically significant relationship ($r = -.11$, $p < .05$) between school level and implementing activities for all six types of involvement. The higher the school level, the less likely schools are to develop family and community involvement activities for all six types.

Case study findings (Sanders & Epstein, 2000a) suggest that some schools have difficulty finding time for regular ATP meetings. Other schools, however, have found ways to overcome this challenge. The majority of survey respondents at all school levels reported that they followed a regular schedule for ATP meetings. Elementary (63%), middle (64%), and high (59%) respondents reported that their Action Teams for Partnership met regularly. Most school respondents (elementary —79%, middle—81%, high—82%) also reported that their teams evaluated progress on partnerships at the end of the school year.

Schools also are making progress toward maintaining or "institutionalizing" their partnership programs. More than half of elementary (59%) and middle schools (56%), and two thirds of all high schools (67%) reported that they had written their One-Year Action Plans for the upcoming academic year. More than one third of respondents from elementary schools (37%), nearly one half from middle schools (49%), and 41% from high schools reported that they had replaced departing ATP members. When schools complete these two activities, they increase the likelihood that the ATP will be ready to implement a planned partnership program at the beginning of each school year.

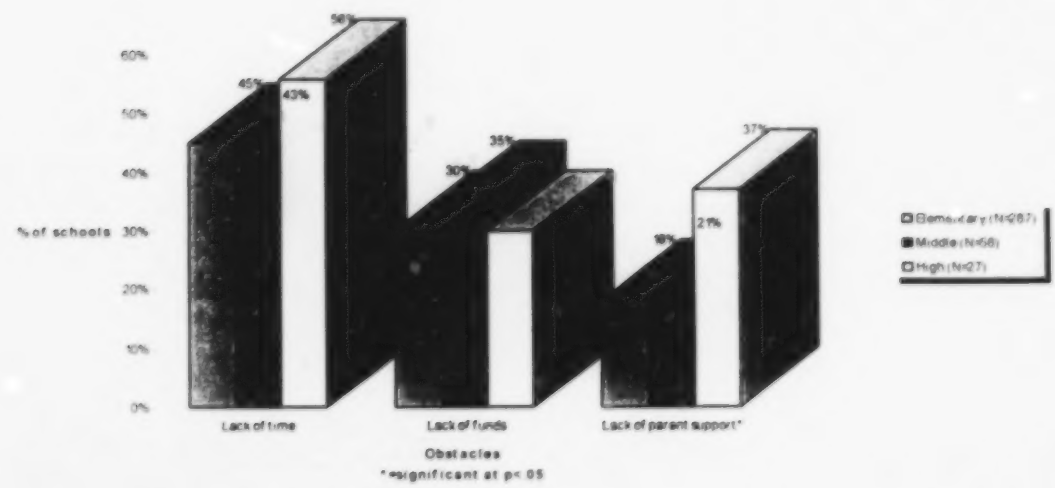
General Support for, and Obstacles to, Partnerships. Research indicates that when ATPs receive widespread support from parents, school staff, district leaders, and community members, they are strengthened in their efforts to build comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs (Sanders, 1999). The absence of such support presents a major obstacle to program development. Survey data were analyzed to identify similarities and differences in the levels of support and obstacles faced by elementary, middle, and high schools in the NNPS.

As reported in Table 1, when asked how much support schools received from community members, most schools—at all levels—reported receiving "a lot" or "some" support (elementary—78%, middle—82%, high—81%). Similarly, respondents at all school levels reported that ATP members provided a lot or some support (elementary —94%, middle —96%, high—89%).

In contrast, compared to elementary and middle school respondents, high school respondents reported significantly less cooperation and support from teachers ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$) and the principal ($r = -.11$, $p < .05$), as well as the PTA ($p = -.15$, $p < .01$). Additionally, more high school respondents (37%) than elementary (18%) and middle school respondents (21%) viewed the lack of support from parents and families as a major obstacle to the development and improvement of school, family, and community partnerships. Bivariate analyses confirmed a statistically significant and positive relationship between school level and a lack of parent support ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

Aside from lack of support, respondents from elementary, middle, and high schools reported similar obstacles to partnership program development. Lack of time was the most common obstacle reported (elementary—45%, middle—43%, high—56%). Lack of adequate funding also was a commonly reported obstacle (elementary—30%, middle—35%, high—30%). See Figure 1.

Fig. 1. School Respondents' Reports of Obstacles to Partnerships



Schools at all levels reported similar median budgets (elementary—$2,000, middle—$3,000, high—$2,000). There was, however, a large discrepancy in the mean budgets across school levels due to several outliers at the elementary and middle school levels. These elementary and middle schools received large grants to hire school-based partnership facilitators and to carry out their partnership activities.

When rating the adequacy of partnership program funding, few schools reported well-funded programs (elementary—7%, middle—6%, high—4%), with most respondents reporting that their programs suffered from a lack of funds (elementary—44%, middle—51%, high— 44%). As highlighted in Table 1, sources of funding for partnership programs varied. Schools identified a total of 15 different funding sources for their partnership programs. Many schools reported using Goals 2000 federal funds (elementary—34%, middle—36%, high—40%). Also, some elementary (17%), middle (25%), and high school (16%) respondents reported using funds from federal drug prevention programs. Compared with elementary (40%) and middle school (38%) respondents, however, fewer high school (24%) respondents reported using principal's discretionary funds. Similarly, fewer high school respondents (16%) reported PTA/PTO contributions than did elementary (51%) and middle school (45%) respondents. Bivariate analyses indicated that among these differences in funding, only PTA/PTO contributions was statistically significant ($r = -.16$, $p = <.01$).

The descriptive statistics reported in this section revealed similarities and differences among grade levels in use of NNPS tools and services, partnership program implementation, and support for, and obstacles to, partnerships by school level. In the following section, this study builds on the descriptive findings to answer an important question in school, family, and community partnership programs—what predicts the *quality* of partnership programs?

Regression Analyses

Quality of School, Family, and Community Partnership Programs. Regression analyses were conducted to learn how school characteristics and program development processes influenced the quality of schools' partnership programs. On the quality of their programs, NNPS schools reported programs that had not yet started (4%), start-up programs (7%), fair/average programs (27%), good programs (37%), very good programs (17%), and excellent programs (8%). With this near normal distribution of the dependent variable, ordinary least squares regression analyses were run to test how school context, partnership program measures, and NNPS measures predicted program quality. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics on variables used in regression analyses.

Independent variables were entered in three blocks to better gauge the effects of specific measures on overall program quality. The first block tested the effects of school context (school level and location) on program quality. As shown in the first column on

Table 3, neither contextual variable significantly predicted program quality. These variables predicted 0% of the variance in program quality.

The next block added three school program variables—General Support, ATP Support, and Funding. As shown in the second column of Table 3, each of these measures significantly and positively predicted program quality. The more General Support (β=.32, $p<.001$), Action Team Support (β=.19, $p<.001$), and satisfaction with Funding (β=.16; $p<.001$), the higher the reports of overall program quality. These variables predicted 23% of the variance in program quality.

Table 3: Factors Influencing the Overall Quality of School, Family, and Community Partnership Programs

VARIABLES	β*	T	β	T	β	T
	Equation 1		Equation 2		Equation 3	
Contextual Variables						
School Level (High School)	-.03	-.56	.02	.44	.02	.49
School Location (Urban)	.03	.45	.07	1.38	.07	1.41
School Program Variables						
General Support			**.32**	**5.63*****	**.33**	**5.72*****
Action Team Support			**.19**	**3.30**	**.17**	**2.97****
Funding			**.16**	**3.13****	**.16**	**3.14****
NNPS Variables						
Years in the NNPS					.08	1.62
Use of NNPS Tools					**.11**	**2.27***
Adjusted R^2	.00		.23		.24	
Number of Respondents	315					

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05
β* = standardized beta coefficient

Finally, as reported in the third column in Table 3, two NNPS measures were added to the model. Years in the NNPS did not significantly predict program quality, but the use of NNPS tools moderately and positively predicted program quality (β=.11, $p<.05$). That is, when schools reported using the NNPS handbook and newsletter, they reported higher quality programs. The introduction of these NNPS measures increased the models' explanatory power only minimally to 24%.

In summary, the quality of partnership programs increases when schools have widespread support from district leaders, school personnel, and families; well-functioning,

supportive ATPs; adequate funding; and research-based tools such as those provided by the NNPS. This is true in urban and non-urban contexts and for elementary, middle, and high schools.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Data from 375 elementary, middle, and high schools in the NNPS reveal differences and similarities in the development and quality of schools' partnership programs. Middle schools in the sample were very similar to elementary schools in their implementation of practices to involve families and communities. Differences in program development components were found primarily between high schools and the other school levels. These primarily centered on obstacles to partnerships, and key aspects of program implementation.

Use of NNPS Tools and Services

School respondents at all levels reported using several NNPS tools and services, especially the network's handbook and newsletter. High school, and to some degree, middle school respondents reported using, or planning to use, the NNPS website and e-mail services more than did elementary school respondents. Although these differences were not statistically significant, the findings may reflect greater access to computers in middle and high schools, or greater comfort with technology among secondary school educators. In either case, such findings suggest that the NNPS should continue to improve its website and e-mail services to be responsive to school members at all levels who may find them useful and convenient ways to obtain and share information.

The desire for additional information on partnerships is clearly indicated in the comments made by survey respondents, especially among high school respondents. When asked how the NNPS can further help them develop and maintain their partnership programs, three quarters of the high school respondents requested more information on school, family, and community partnerships at the secondary level. For example, they wrote:

> *We need...more information that focuses on the secondary level.* (School #228)

> *The network can help by continuing to provide information on successful high school partnership programs. There are a number of successful elementary programs but a limited number of high school programs.* (School #46)

> *Continue to develop and provide materials.* (School #497)

Obstacles to Partnerships

This report also highlights some similarities and differences in the obstacles to partnership program development faced by elementary, middle, and high schools. NNPS key contacts at all school levels reported lack of funding and time as major obstacles to implementing and improving their programs. More high school respondents, however, reported a lack of parent/family support as a major obstacle to program development. This finding is supported by other studies (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Epstein & Connors, 1994; Sanders, 1998; Sanders & Epstein, 2000a) that suggest that high schools receive less support from parents than elementary schools, with middle schools falling somewhere in between. There are many reasons for this initial apathy, but primary among them is the traditional view that family involvement in students' learning is not important as children mature into adolescence and young adulthood. Now, there is growing awareness that although the ways that parents and other significant adults are involved in adolescents' schooling may change (Catsambis & Garland, 1997; Lee, 1994), family involvement remains important throughout a student's education (Elmen, 1991; Simon, 2001).

Research in the United States and in other countries indicates that when high schools design and implement age-appropriate programs of school, family, and community partnership, parents and educators improve their attitudes about the importance of partnerships, and family involvement and support increase (Epstein & Sanders, 1996; Sanders & Epstein, 1996). Continued analysis of data from high schools will allow the NNPS to monitor the effects of partnership program development on levels of family involvement over time. The NNPS also will encourage high schools to contribute to an annual collection of promising partnership practices and participate in other NNPS research initiatives. In this way, NNPS high schools across the U.S. can share information about activities and strategies that helped them to develop stronger connections with their students' families and communities.

The survey asked the open-ended question, "What has changed most at your school as a result of your partnership efforts?" Respondents reported big and small improvements. More than one quarter (28%) of the high school respondents stated that family involvement and attitudes had improved.

One respondent stated:

> *The growth in parent and community involvement has been wonderful. Parents are more visible on campus and are sharing that they feel more welcomed and appreciated.* (School #228)

Another observed:

> *New parents are involved and connected to the school.... We have been able to reach more Hispanic parents.* (School #235)

And one respondent concisely stated:

Families now feel that they have greater ownership of the school. (School #423)

These improvements suggest that when high schools reach out to the families and communities of their students, families, and communities respond with greater involvement.

Program Implementation and Quality

The survey data indicated that elementary, middle, and high schools are making progress in improving the quality of their school, family, and community partnerships. Schools reported implementing meaningful partnership activities that were linked to school goals, such as improving student achievement, behavior, and attendance; school climate; and parental and community involvement. For example, an elementary school in Wichita, Kansas hosted a reading camp in the school library as part of its program to improve students' reading achievement. The school library was decorated with lanterns, sleeping bags, and artificial logs. Students and parents brought blankets and sleeping bags and read books throughout the evening while munching on trail mix. A junior high school in Sylvania, Ohio implemented a "festival-like" kick-off event for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and parents. The event, which included free refreshments, a disc jockey, raffle prizes, and the opportunity to mingle with school administrators, teachers, and other school staff, focused on improving school climate. Finally, a high school in Baltimore, Maryland held a luncheon and school tour for community business leaders to encourage greater involvement in school improvement efforts.

Some of the reported partnership activities were common across grade levels. School newsletters, parent information folders, and volunteer directories were implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools. However, the content and frequency of newsletters, the information provided in parent folders, and the type of volunteer opportunities listed in directories differed based on grade level, in part to meet the varied developmental needs of elementary, middle, and high school students. Other practices differed by school level. Transition programs were most common in high schools; homework hotlines were most popular at middle schools; and family appreciation days, book giveaways and other reading incentive programs were most common among elementary schools (Salinas, Clark, Simon, & Van Voorhis, 1998).

Although schools across grade levels were improving the quality of their partnership programs through such activities, high schools were less likely to report implementing activities for each of the six types of involvement. Case studies of high schools suggest that some may begin developing their partnership programs by focusing on a few types of involvement, and including other types as their programs develop (Sanders, 1998). This "scaling-up" approach may be one way for some schools to concentrate on other important

program development areas, such as establishing well-structured and effective ATPs that are important for increasing the quality of their partnership programs.

Multiple regression analyses highlight four factors that are important to the overall quality of a school's partnership program. These are: widespread support for partnerships; a supportive, engaged ATP; an adequate level of funding; and the active use of research-based tools such as those provided by the NNPS. Regardless of the school level or location, NNPS schools with higher levels of these resources are more likely than other schools to have high-quality partnership programs.

Importantly, the findings of this study suggest that among NNPS members there is nothing inherent in middle or high schools that prevents effective partnerships. Rather, it is their capacity to garner, direct, and maintain the necessary resources, support, and actions that determines how effectively they connect with adolescents' families and communities. Because secondary school educators often lack experience in conducting productive partnerships, professional development is needed to increase their capacity to reach beyond the school walls to support high school students' success.

The NNPS was initiated to increase the capacity of school, district, and state educational leaders to build comprehensive partnership programs at all levels, with all families, and for all students (Sanders & Epstein, 2000b). Recognizing the special challenges faced by secondary schools, NNPS has added specialized staff to provide more support to middle and high school educators working to develop high-quality partnership programs. With this additional assistance, the NNPS expects to increase its membership of secondary schools and improve the quality of these schools' partnership programs.

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